



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUG. 4, 2006

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., First Lady Vikki Shirley commend Smith Lake officials for new Veteran's Center

SMITH LAKE, N.M. – Navajo veterans of this community and across the Navajo Nation will forever be remembered for their service, sacrifice and dedication to country and homeland through the construction of a new veterans' center here.

Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., First Lady Vikki Shirley, New Mexico Office of Indian Affairs Secretary Bennie Shendo and N.M. State Representatives Ken Martinez, Dist. 69, and Irvin Harrison, Dist. 5, were among several hundred people on hand for the groundbreaking ceremony of the new center here Thursday.

"We are here today because of *k'e*," the President said. "*K'e* makes things happen. There is freedom in the land because of them, our soldiers, veterans and their families."

In the Navajo language and way of life, *k'e* is the foundation of Navajo clan relationships that guide all interactions between community and family members.

About 30 veterans and their families were honored during the groundbreaking. President Shirley said veterans take an awesome oath and responsibility to protect the Navajo way of life. He said they have offered their lives for us. He said the veterans here will now be able to use the new hall to plan for continued growth for themselves and their families.



As a gesture of thanks for help and support, President Shirley drapes a Pendleton robe around New Mexico Secretary for Indian Affairs Bennie Shendo during a groundbreaking ceremony for the new Smith Lake Chapter Veterans Center. Rebecca Martinez, manager of the Capital Outlay Unit for New Mexico Indian Affairs office, was also presented with a blanket. N.M. State Representative Irvin Harrison was presented with a turquoise bolo tie and belt buckle. About 30 veterans and families were recognized throughout the event.

“Smith Lake Chapter officials are our example of how to do business with the State of New Mexico.”

– Rebecca Martinez, Capital Outlay Unit manager
of the New Mexico Office of Indian Affairs

The President thanked Secretary Shendo, N.M. Gov. Bill Richardson, both whom he calls his brothers, the Smith Lake Chapter and others for making the construction of the center a reality.

Pearl Henry, Smith Lake Chapter vice president, said the center came about through working together with the chapter, President Shirley and the Navajo Nation Council.

“We did this by working together with the council and President,” she said. “Let’s all be together. That’s how we can be successful for our community. I appreciate all your support for this project. We would not have this dedication if we did not work together. Today we are celebrating due to the President’s office and senators and representatives working together.”

Mariano Lake/Smith Lake Council Delegate Young Jeff Tom said \$425,000 for the center was received in January.

Rep. Martinez recognized the efforts of the President and First Lady for their work in lowering New Mexico DWI rates. He said New Mexico was recognized not only in the 50 states but throughout the world for this accomplishment.

“They turned a personal tragedy into a public safety issue,” he said. “We have also honored President Shirley in Santa Fe for his leadership for the Navajo Nation.”

Rebecca Martinez, manager of the Capital Outlay Unit for New Mexico Indian Affairs office, credited Smith Lake Community Services Coordinator Jackson Gibson for his follow-through to get the project done.

“We are going to use the Smith Lake Chapter government officials as our example of how to do business with the State of New Mexico,” she said.

She said 35 percent of the \$650,000 capital outlay funding will go toward veterans programs for vehicles, equipment, halls, propane for the less fortunate veterans.

“The veterans have been moving ahead because they are outspoken about their needs,” she said. “We look forward to working together on more projects in the future.”

Mr. Shendo added that when he became a cabinet secretary for Gov. Richardson, “the first person that came through my door was Mr. Jackson Gibson. We sat down and talked. That is how this project came to fruition.”

Rep. Harrison said Smith Lake has benefited by some \$450,000 in projects, and joined those in crediting the work of Mr. Gibson.

The President said it was this kind of cooperation with states that will assist the Navajo Nation to regain the independence it once knew. Today, with its growing population, he said there continues to be an unmet need of some \$500 million for electricity, water, sewer systems, roads and other essential services.

“My dream is for my people to stand independent once more like we once were; fierce, proud and self-sufficient,” the President said. “I commend all of the chapter leaders with appreciation for working together. We need to duplicate this effort in other chapters.”

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